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## Outreach, Impact, Collaboration: Why Academics Should Join to Stand Against Poverty

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**Abstract:** This article offer reasons why academics should feel compelled to play a more direct role in the alleviation of global poverty, specifically through participation in a new international network, Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP). Academics have the specialized training and knowledge, and the societal role, that make them particularly well equipped to make a significant contribution. They also have responsibilities to answer sometimes spurious or misleading claims made about aspects of global poverty by others in the profession, and to highlight ways in which their own governments are implicated in the perpetuation of severe global poverty. By joining forces with like-minded others in a group such as ASAP, they can enhance their own impact on poverty dialogue and policy outcomes. Those academics already playing prominent direct roles—for example, as government consultants, in public discourse, or through leadership in professional associations—can deepen their influence through sharing their insights and expertise with other ASAP members.

It is a typical late afternoon in the Timarpur neighborhood, lying just across the Mahatma Gandhi Marg ring road from the University of Delhi North Campus. Families gather outside one- and two-room brick living quarters, many of which have only a single draped cloth serving as the front wall. Other homes are made of found materials: cloth or plastic bound over slim wooden poles; their walls a mishmash of blankets, boards, and corrugated metal; their roofs made of metal or blue plastic tarpaulins weighted against the wind with stones and bricks. A boy of perhaps four fills a bucket at the single communal tap serving a dozen families and wobbles up a set of stairs, sloshing out water with each step. Another child,

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younger, plays quietly beside a woman sleeping on the pavement under a shelter of plastic and burlap bags.

On the street, cycle rickshaw drivers—among the hundreds of thousands of laborers in the city who toil for often less than \$2 per day—strain as they pedal as many as four passengers or enormous loads of cardboard, rice, building materials, or scrap metal along the margins of the street. They are cut off repeatedly by scooters, motorcycles, cars, buses, and large trucks, all incessantly honking warnings to one another. Across the street from the makeshift housing rise four-story apartment buildings. Air conditioners protrude from the neat plaster exterior of each unit. The complex is enclosed by tall brick walls topped with iron bars and coils of barbed wire. Some residents take the air on their balconies, occasionally eyeing the scene outside the shanty homes.

Perhaps half a mile away, in an auditorium on the Delhi University campus, more than 260 academics, NGO practitioners, and students joined together to reflect on the persistence of such deep deprivation and inequality amidst India's new economic dynamism. In breakout sessions, they shared their own experiences from poverty research, antipoverty campaigns, media outreach, and growing up in or surrounded by extreme poverty. Finally, they explored ways in which Indian and other academics globally might combine efforts to have a more direct and powerful impact on addressing such inequality and poverty.

The October 2011 India launch of Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) was one of six ASAP meetings staged in various countries over the past year, each designed to better mobilize the potential of area researchers, teachers, and students to effect positive change. In this essay, we discuss some specific contributions that can be made. The argument is mainly addressed to those researchers and teachers whose work focuses on aspects of poverty, but we believe that academics from virtually all disciplines can make distinct contributions.

We begin with some general remarks on reasons why academics should feel compelled to become more directly engaged—in both practical and political terms—in efforts to eradicate severe poverty. We then offer more specific examples of such engagement, including some existing intervention projects. We also respond to critics who say that “naive do-gooders” should not insert themselves into debates, that too much may be demanded of individual academics, or that duties to relatively poor compatriots should take priority over the needs of absolutely poor people elsewhere. The concerns raised by each criticism, we argue, are less compelling than the gains that could be realized through more direct engagement. We close by discussing in more detail the efforts of Academics Stand Against Poverty, especially how it seeks to help academics engage in the ways detailed in this essay. We also discuss the opportunities ASAP provides for the sharing of insight and expertise by those academics already taking their ideas to broader audiences, or who are advising government aid agencies or NGOs, corporations, or international agencies. Finally, we demonstrate ways in which such an organization can promote fruitful collaboration across existing academic associations and research centers focused on issues of global poverty.<sup>2</sup>

### **Why Take Sides?**

Between 1988 and 2005, the poorest quarter of humanity lost a third of its share of global household income, seeing this share shrink to a miniscule 0.78 percent. Challenging some rosy poverty reports,<sup>3</sup> and despite highly publicized commitments such as the Millennium

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<sup>2</sup> Professional associations would include the Development Studies Association, the International Development Ethics Association, the International Global Ethics Association, the International Ethics section of the International Studies Association, and numerous country-specific associations of development economists. Each does extremely valuable work in bringing academics together to discuss their own research, identify important developments, and set research emphases. We see tremendous potential for effecting positive change in helping members of such groups collaborate on outreach and impact efforts on specific issues.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Laurence Chandy and Geoffrey Gertz, “Quantifying Poverty’s Global Decline,” Brookings Institution, October 2011; [www.brookings.edu/articles/2011/10\\_poverty\\_global\\_decline\\_chandy.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2011/10_poverty_global_decline_chandy.aspx). Chandy

Development Goals (MDGs), the number of chronically undernourished people has steadily increased, exceeding 1 billion for the first time in human history. Deaths from poverty-related causes still number around 18 million annually, accounting for about a third of all human deaths. The need to do better is overwhelmingly obvious. What then, as researchers, teachers, and students, can and should we do to help protect the world's poor?

We will note first that many people within and outside the academy believe that it is inappropriate for academics to participate in public debates in a partisan way: to support or oppose particular treaties or pieces of legislation, to criticize or defend particular politicians or political agencies or decisions. Academics ought to present the results of their research—facts, theories, reasoning—but they should then let the political discourse take over and let its participants draw on the published work as they see fit. By maintaining some distance from the heated political debates of the day, academia maintains its dignity and reputation for objectivity, or so the argument goes.<sup>4</sup>

We see some merit in this argument, but we believe that, in the world as it is, there are much stronger reasons to the contrary, and four in particular. First, the political issues facing politicians and the general public are of such immense importance that, if academics can help address them through concerted efforts, the gains will far outweigh any losses to academic

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and Gertz argue that global poverty, as measured according to the World Bank's \$1.25 per day poverty line in purchasing power parity, has trended steadily downward in recent years, due especially to growth in China and other "rising power" countries. For a discussion of some grave problems with the World Bank's poverty measures, and related measurement problems with the MDG aim of halving global poverty by 2015, see Thomas Pogge, *Politics As Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), chaps. 3–4. And see *ibid.*, pp. 100–107, for reasons to be skeptical about some of the claims made for growth and poverty reduction in China. The discourse around measurement issues is rich and complex, of course, and this is not to suggest that any one account provides *the* answer. For cutting-edge discussion of such issues, see the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative website at [www.ophi.org.uk/](http://www.ophi.org.uk/). Work conducted within the initiative, which is headed by Sabina Alkire, is fine-grained and instructive for the ways in which it seeks to take into account the full range of issues that arise in the measurement of aspects of poverty.

<sup>4</sup> For a representative articulation of this argument, addressed to philosophers and normative theorists, see Gerald Gaus, "Should Philosophers 'Apply Ethics'?" *Think* (Spring 2005), pp. 63–67.

dignity and reputation. Second, academics in modern societies hold a public position that comes with certain expectations and duties of engagement. Third, many academics are already involved in public debates, and they are often paid by organizations with a substantial stake in the outcome. In regard to many such debates, the dignity of the academy is already compromised, and silence will merely concede the terrain to academics for hire. Finally, through their training and societal role, many academics are well prepared to assist poverty alleviation through making important contributions, including amplifying the voices of the poor.

### *The Urgency of the Issues*

Humanity faces potentially catastrophic ecological problems, including massive climate change and the depletion of crucially important and nonrenewable natural resources, such as crude oil.<sup>5</sup> We face the proliferation of extremely dangerous technologies, including nuclear and biological weapons, which could decimate the human species.<sup>6</sup> And—our topic here—humanity is suffering a silent catastrophe of severe poverty, which accounts for a third of all human deaths and for unimaginable suffering from hunger, disease, and other deprivations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Climate change, e.g., could have grave effects on global food production, increasing hunger dramatically in many of the poorer countries. See Molly E. Brown and Christopher C. Funk, “Food Security Under Climate Change,” *Science* 319, no. 5863 (February 2008), pp. 580–81; see also David B. Lobell, Marshall B. Burke, Claudia Tebaldi, Michael D. Mastrandrea, Walter P. Falcon, and Rosamond L. Naylor, “Prioritizing Climate Change Adaptation Needs for Food Security in 2030,” *Science* 319, no. 5863 (February 2008), pp. 607–10. And see Simon Caney, this issue. **[EDITORS: Add titles of articles here and below.]**

<sup>6</sup> See Joseph Cirincione, *Bomb Scare: The History and Future of Nuclear Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), esp. chap. 5. Cirincione details how, though nuclear tensions are not as acute as during the height of the cold war, pressing issues remain.

<sup>7</sup> Detailed information on global poverty has become more widely available in recent years, though there are some of the same measurement issues noted above. For a discussion that relies on some problematic measurements but nonetheless offers an instructive geographic mapping of global poverty, see Christopher D. Elvidge, Paul C. Sutton, Tilottama Ghosh, Benjamin T. Tuttle, Kimberly E. Baugh, Budhendra Bhaduri, and Edward Bright, “A Global Poverty Map Derived from Satellite Data,” *Computers & Geosciences* 35, no. 8 (2009), pp. 1652–60.

After the world's governments had promised, at the 1996 World Food Summit in Rome, to halve the number of chronically undernourished people by 2015, this number actually rose—during a decade of falling food prices—from 788 to 843 million. This rise accelerated in 2006, when food prices began to increase. With food prices at record levels in 2011,<sup>8</sup> the number of chronically undernourished people is likely to have set yet another historical record, well above the 1 billion mark.

The simple explanation for this phenomenon is the rapid growth in global inequality. During the 1988–2005 period, the poorest quarter of the human population saw its share of global household income reduced by nearly a third, from 1.16 to 0.78 percent. The share of the poorest half was reduced from 3.53 to 2.92 percent. As a result of such rapid economic marginalization, poor people cannot exert sufficient market demand to induce farmers to plant the basic foodstuffs they need—in preference to, say, crops used to produce biofuels for purchase by more affluent populations. The numbers make clear that severe poverty is quite avoidable today. Much of today's severe poverty would not exist if the poor had merely participated proportionately in recent global economic growth. In fact, however, the fruits of this growth have largely gone to the top 5 percent of the world's population, which managed to increase its share of global household income from 42.87 to 46.36 percent in the 1988–2005 period.

One obvious explanation for why the world's most affluent people have done so well in the last few decades is that they—and especially the richest among them—have had the best opportunities to influence, through their governments, the emerging supranational institutional architecture enshrined in and surrounding the World Trade Organization (WTO) Treaty. To be sure, the rich do not hate the poor, but their efforts to influence supranational

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<sup>8</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, "Food Outlook: Global Market Analysis," June 2011. Online: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/al978e/al978e00.pdf>

rules and their application are, unsurprisingly, guided by their own economic and political interests. And existing supranational institutional arrangements clearly bear the imprint of these interests. For example:

1. Affluent countries and their firms buy huge quantities of natural resources from the rulers of developing countries without regard for how such rulers came to power and how they exercise power. In many cases, this amounts to collaboration in the theft of these resources from their owners, the countries' people. It also enriches their oppressors, thereby entrenching the oppression: tyrants sell the natural resources of their victims and then use the proceeds to buy the weapons they need to keep themselves in power.<sup>9</sup>
2. Affluent countries and their banks lend money to such rulers and compel a given country's people to repay it even after the ruler is gone. Many poor populations are still repaying debts incurred, against their will, by such kleptocrats as Suharto in Indonesia, Mobutu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Abacha in Nigeria. Again, such lending and subsequent debt collection amounts to theft: the unilateral imposition of debt burdens on impoverished populations.
3. Affluent countries facilitate the embezzlement of funds by public officials in less developed countries by allowing their banks to accept such funds. This complicity could easily be avoided: banks are already under strict reporting requirements with regard to funds suspected of being related to terrorism or drug trafficking. Yet Western banks still eagerly accept and manage embezzled funds, with governments ensuring that their banks remain attractive for such illicit deposits. Global Financial Integrity (GFI) estimates that less developed countries have in this way lost between \$342 and \$404.7 billion annually during the 2000–2008 period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); and Leif Wenar, "Property Rights and the Resource Curse," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 36, no. 1 (2008), pp. 2–32.

<sup>10</sup> Dev Kar and Karly Curcio, *Illicit Financial Flows from Developing Countries: 2000–2009* (Washington, D.C.: Global Financial Integrity, 2011). This outflow is over four times larger than all official development assistance, which, during this period, averaged \$83 billion annually, of which only \$8 billion was allocated to "basic social services." United Nations, MDG Indicators; [unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Search.aspx?q=bss%20oda](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mdg/Search.aspx?q=bss%20oda).



4. Affluent countries facilitate tax evasion in the less developed countries through lax accounting standards for multinational corporations. Since they are not required to do country-by-country reporting, such corporations can easily manipulate transfer prices among their subsidiaries to concentrate their profits where these are taxed the least. As a result, they may report no profit in the countries in which they extract, manufacture, or sell goods or services, having their worldwide profits taxed instead in some tax haven where they only have a paper presence. GFI estimates that during the 2002–2006 period trade mispricing deprived less developed countries of \$98.4 billion per annum in tax revenues.<sup>11</sup>
5. Affluent countries account for a disproportionate share of global pollution. Their emissions are prime contributors to serious health hazards, extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and climate change, to which poor populations are especially vulnerable. A 2009 report by the Global Humanitarian Forum estimated that climate change is already seriously affecting 325 million people and is annually causing \$125 billion in economic losses, as well as 300,000 deaths, of which 99 percent are in less developed countries.<sup>12</sup>
6. Affluent countries have created a global trading regime that was supposed to release large collective gains through free and open markets. But the regime is rigged: it permits rich states to continue to protect their markets through tariffs and anti-dumping duties and to gain larger world market shares through export credits and subsidies (including about \$227 billion annually in agriculture alone) that poor countries cannot afford to match.<sup>13</sup> Since production is much more labor-intensive in poor than in affluent countries, such protectionist measures destroy many more jobs than they create.

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<sup>11</sup> Ann Hollingshead, *The Implied Tax Revenue Loss from Trade Mispricing* (Washington, D.C.: Global Financial Integrity, 2010), p. 15, Table 2.

<sup>12</sup> Global Humanitarian Forum, *The Anatomy of a Silent Crisis* (Geneva: Global Humanitarian Forum, 2009), pp. 1 and 60–61.

<sup>13</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Agricultural Policy Monitoring and Evaluation 2011: OECD Countries and Emerging Economies* (Paris: OECD, 2011), p. 18 (which also states that in 2010 government subsidies accounted for 18 percent of gross farm receipts in OECD countries).

These six points bring out a further reason why the topic of world poverty is such an urgent one for academics to address: academics as well as their students and readers tend to belong to the more affluent, who are favored by the injustices of supranational institutional arrangements. As such, we are likely to have special responsibilities to explore and to highlight structural injustices that our governments design and uphold in our name.<sup>14</sup>

### *The Academic Position*

The second reason for academics to take sides is that they hold a public position in modern societies. This office comes with certain expectations and responsibilities. When there are public debates that turn on matters of academic expertise, the public expects academics to contribute this expertise. When there is an important public debate—for example, about whether an international emergency effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is needed—scientists are expected to contribute their knowledge insofar as it is reasonably well established.

Given this expectation, academic silence can reasonably be interpreted as academic acceptance that the main views represented in the public debate are credible views, consistent with the available evidence. Those who accept academic posts that come with this plausible expectation have a responsibility to live up to it, much like someone who accepts a lifeguard position has a responsibility to rescue endangered bathers on her stretch of beach. If climate scientists fail to point out that the available evidence overwhelmingly supports the hypothesis of anthropogenic climate change, they will reasonably be taken to communicate that the jury

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<sup>14</sup> These special responsibilities could be grounded in negative duties, where individuals are understood to be contributing to the harms identified and thus are obligated to help end them. A complementary positive duties grounding would see the materially secure within affluent states as especially well placed to advocate for the changes in governance that would address the harms, and thus as having positive duties to do so. For an account emphasizing the former, see Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, esp. chaps. 4–6. For one emphasizing the latter, see Luis Cabrera, *The Practice of Global Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. pp. 90–95.

is still out on this question, that the alternative hypothesis is still a live candidate. And they will then be responsible for the effects of this communication: that is, for the ensuing delay in taking the urgently needed action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This duty plausibly extends to the classroom. Of course, instructors are not required to indoctrinate students with any particular view about global poverty. Rather, as the framers of specific topics or subfields, they should ensure that they are offering an appropriately broad and critical range of information to students in courses that take up—or arguably should take up—aspects of global poverty. The introductory course in International Relations can, for example, incorporate a unit or continuing thread devoted to poverty and possible transborder duties to address it. To exclude this theme from the course expresses the judgment that it merits no serious consideration in the study of world politics. An analogous point can be made about a wide range of courses in the social sciences and humanities, as well as many in the natural sciences and medicine, where implications for poverty-related issues can be highlighted even in students' foundational training. Given the urgency of the issues identified above, it is plausible to claim that the classroom instructor has a responsibility to incorporate salient information about poverty into the syllabi of courses of many kinds.

### *A Duty to Respond*

Closely related to the idea of the academic as holder of an important societal position is the understanding that academics have a responsibility to react when, in their areas of expertise, spurious claims are publicly made, especially by other academics. In fact, the exhortation that academics should stay out of the public debates of the day manifests a good dose of naiveté. When the stakes are high, academics can capture large rewards by supporting one side or the other. That academics are susceptible to such incentives can be observed in the U.S. court system, where many earn lucrative fees for reliably weighing in on the side of whomever

hires them to testify.<sup>15</sup> In public debates, as well, we find many academics succumbing to the lure of such rewards and then weighing in on whichever side provides more money—often the wrong side. The rearguard battles about the harmfulness of tobacco products present an excellent example of this phenomenon: for several decades hired academic experts managed to prolong the impression that the evidence about the effects of tobacco was inconclusive.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, pharmaceutical experts have accepted large corporate payments to tout the safety and efficacy of high-priced medicines. And there are still many academics, often with grants from interested corporations, willing to deny the reality of anthropogenic climate change.

These phenomena are perhaps most appalling in the debate about the effects of our emerging global governance institutions on the evolution of poverty. Corporations have trillions of dollars at stake in sustaining the public perception that the dramatic institutional changes they have lobbied so hard to achieve are good for all, including the poor. While they and their politicians and experts busily propagate the attractive myth that a rising tide is equally lifting all boats, the poor themselves, who do not have high-priced publicity experts on call to frame and press their side of the story, are mostly muted. The result is a peculiar world in which nearly all publicly available experts agree that the prevailing style of globalization, under the auspices of the WTO, has been a great boon for the world's poor, even while the number of chronically undernourished people is setting new all-time records almost every year. In this Wonderland world—our actual world—there is no academic purity to be preserved: the silence of academic experts reinforces the public's perception that WTO globalization has been good for the poor.

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<sup>15</sup> For discussion of some salient issues around the use of expert witnesses, in particular economists, in the U.S. context, see Richard A. Posner, "The Law and Economics of the Economic Expert Witness," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13, no. 2 (Spring 1999), pp. 91–99.

<sup>16</sup> See John A. Francis, Amy K. Shea, and Jonathan M. Samet, "Challenging the Epidemiologic Evidence on Passive Smoking: Tactics of Tobacco Industry Expert Witnesses," *Tobacco Control* 15, Suppl. 4 (December 2006), pp. iv68–iv76.

The public will reasonably attribute this view to the silent experts as well, legitimately expecting that, if the reports issued by governments and their international organizations were false or biased, then they would be loudly challenged. If academic experts were more visibly scrutinizing and challenging these reports, the public and the media would take a more critical attitude. This heightened scrutiny would also cause the paid defenders of the status quo to state their case with more care and attention to the evidence, as they would then face a real risk of public embarrassment (a risk that at present is negligible). As academics, we should try to reduce academic obstacles to poverty eradication, at least where this can be done at relatively little cost.

### *Academics' Capacities*

Finally, poverty-focused academics in particular have duties to engage based on their potential to make contributions that are significant, distinctive, and complementary to other efforts, such as those of some large development NGOs.<sup>17</sup> Such academics undertake years of intensive training in subject and method, and their substantive knowledge may be equal to or even exceed that of the policy-makers, journalists, and others who do the lion's share of issue-framing salient to poverty alleviation.

When aggression by Germany and Japan threatened human civilization, many academics profoundly changed what they were doing in order to contribute their expert labor to the goal of defeating the Axis powers. Today, we approve and celebrate such efforts.<sup>18</sup> But

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<sup>17</sup> An exemplar would be Oxfam's GROW campaign, seeking to address fundamental problems in global food production and distribution; [www.oxfam.org.uk/get\\_involved/system/](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/get_involved/system/).

<sup>18</sup> See Ad Maas and Hans Hooijmaijers, eds., *Scientific Research in World War II: What Scientists Did During the War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009). Some efforts, of course, such as the development of nuclear weapons, cannot be simply lauded. In the context of this essay, however, it is important to note that many of the same scientists whose work was instrumental in developing these weapons helped lead postwar efforts to control their spread. Einstein in particular suspended his core scientific work to campaign globally for a unified political

many also believe that our times are different: normal, peaceful, and benign. And indeed, so they may seem from a privileged vantage point in one of the wealthier countries. Yet poverty today causes more deaths and suffering than the Second World War did during its darkest years.<sup>19</sup> And the catastrophes that climate change could inflict on our descendants dwarf even the horrendous impact of that worst war of human history. The need for action remains compelling and immediate. Those economists, environmental scientists, development studies specialists, political scientists, philosophers, and others with expertise salient to the problems of global poverty can and should feel compelled to put their highly developed skills to best use in the public arena. Those already deeply immersed in public dialogue and consultation with governments and development agents can magnify their impact through closer coordination with like-minded others in academia.

### **What Academics Can Do and Are Doing**

So, what can and should academics do, concretely, toward these ends? How can we meet our responsibilities to the public and the world's poor, and how can our talents and expertise make a specific contribution to meeting humanity's great moral duty to end avoidable severe poverty as soon as reasonably possible? We offer here a three-part framework for contribution. It involves: (1) outreach to broader audiences, (2) impact on poverty through more direct interventions, and (3) greater inclusion of the voices of the global poor. The background assumption for each is again that academics who are already engaging in such

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solution. See Susan Caudill, "Trying to Harness Atomic Energy, 1946–1951: Albert Einstein's Publicity Campaign for World Government," *Journalism Quarterly* 1–2 (Spring/Summer 1991), pp. 253–62.

<sup>19</sup> Total deaths related to World War II (1939–45) are estimated at more than 48 million: some 8 or even 10 million per annum. The total includes some 7.6 million military deaths on the Axis side, and more than 3 million Axis country civilian deaths, as well as 14.2 million Allied military deaths and more than 24 million civilian deaths in the Allied countries, including China. Ian Dear and M. R. D. Foot, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 225.

efforts can increase their impact through collaborative participation in a group such as Academics Stand Against Poverty, on which more below.

First, academics from various fields can engage in public outreach, which in the jargon of research funding agencies is increasingly called “knowledge transfer.” We can share our expertise on specific poverty issues through popular print, online, and broadcast media; in public debates, in testimony before decision-making bodies, and through collaboration with some corporations and civil society organizations. Such activities can be crucial for presenting new findings, challenging assumptions in public discourse, and especially for helping to frame the discourse around global poverty with appropriate academic input. For example, following from our opening remarks, academics would have a crucial role to play in checking the overly rosy poverty news purveyed by many governments and intergovernmental organizations. In doing so, we can both sharpen and amplify popular demands for stronger action. Such outlets as the *Guardian*’s “Poverty Matters Blog” on global development issues provide a high-profile public platform to share insights and present challenges to the policies and actions of various agencies.<sup>20</sup>

Closely related are two further tasks. By directing more effort to exploring the causes of the persistence of poverty, we can prod politicians and citizens to raise more specific demands that go beyond descriptions of what should happen (as in the MDGs), to demands that formulate what particular actors ought to do.<sup>21</sup> And by articulating clearly the grounds of

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<sup>20</sup> The blog is underwritten financially by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation; [www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters](http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters).

<sup>21</sup> For background on most states’ unwillingness to make firm, time-specific commitments to actually achieving the MDGs, rather than softer commitments to strive toward their fulfillment, see David Hulme, “The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): A Short History of the World’s Biggest Promise,” Brooks World Poverty Institute Working Paper 100 (September 2009), esp. pp. 36–43; [www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-10009.pdf](http://www.bwpi.manchester.ac.uk/resources/Working-Papers/bwpi-wp-10009.pdf).

the imperative to eradicate poverty, we can make this imperative harder to exclude from national and international political agendas.

The second part of the framework involves impact, or efforts at contributing more directly to poverty alleviation. This also is an increasingly strong emphasis of funding agencies in the United Kingdom, Europe, and elsewhere. In England, where a significant portion of public university funding is determined by a comprehensive research review that takes place roughly every six years, all university departments are now expected to discuss the tangible impact of their research activities. Impact in this context goes beyond the transfer of information to government bodies or public audiences; it involves demonstrable concrete effects on government policy, NGO efforts, or the lives of actual persons.<sup>22</sup> The bar may seem high to those whose scholarly contributions are not so immediate or readily quantifiable. We also recognize the justifiable critiques of a deep economic instrumentalism inherent in some ways in which impact and knowledge transfer have been promoted.<sup>23</sup> Yet the impact concept can be usefully adapted. In the context of global poverty, thousands of academics across the world are capable of making direct and potentially significant contributions, individually or collectively, and often in partnership with nonacademic actors.

Exemplifying collective contribution, an early initiative by ASAP has helped bring more academic voices into the nascent global discourse around what should replace the Millennium Development Goals, which were formulated after the 2000 United Nations

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<sup>22</sup> In the exercise, whose current iteration is called the Research Excellence Framework 2014, impact is defined as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.” Higher Education Funding Council for England, “Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions” (July 2011), p. 48; [www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02\\_11/02\\_11.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2011/02_11/02_11.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> See Harriet Swain, “Higher Education White Paper is Provoking a Winter of Discontent,” *Guardian*, September 27, 2011.



Millennium Summit and are to expire in 2015.<sup>24</sup> This project will provide an important complement to an advocacy campaign by the NGO coalition Beyond 2015, which aims to build “a global, multi-stakeholder movement for a legitimate post-2015 framework.”<sup>25</sup> Both efforts can be seen as important contributions to a dialogue around MDG implementation and effectiveness, which itself has involved scores of academics working with United Nations agencies and others.<sup>26</sup>

Another effort aims systematically to assess the effectiveness of antipoverty organizations with an eye to channeling contributions where they will make the greatest difference. This interdisciplinary and civil society–based project, GiveWell,<sup>27</sup> is itself an important complement to emerging academic research on aid outcomes, effectiveness, and accountability.<sup>28</sup> GiveWell also provides a model and possible opportunities for academics to become more directly involved. A separate effort explores how the purchases of natural

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<sup>24</sup> The project is titled the “Global Poverty Consensus Report.” Details are available at [www.academicsstand.org](http://www.academicsstand.org).

<sup>25</sup> The Beyond 2015 website is at [beyond2015.org/](http://beyond2015.org/).

<sup>26</sup> The UN Millennium Project was headed by Columbia University economist Jeffrey Sachs. From its UN commissioning in 2002 through 2006, it drew on the expertise of a wide range of academics to produce recommendations for implementing and achieving the major Millennium Development Goals, including halving chronic hunger globally, achieving universal primary education, decreasing child and maternal mortality, reducing deaths from tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and malaria. The final reports of the various task forces under the project are available at [www.unmillenniumproject.org](http://www.unmillenniumproject.org). Project leaders were active in outreach, including placing numerous opinion pieces reporting their assessments and supporting the MDG effort generally in major newspapers. For a representative public-dialogue critique of the MDG effort, especially on some challenges in actually measuring the stated goals, see the guest editorial by former Sachs collaborator and principal in the founding of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, Amir Attaran, “Necessary Measures,” *New York Times*, September 13, 2005; [www.nytimes.com/2005/09/13/opinion/13attaran.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/13/opinion/13attaran.html); see also Amir Attaran, “An Immeasurable Crisis? A Criticism of the Millennium Development Goals and Why They Cannot Be Measured,” *PloS Medicine* 2, no. 10 (September 13, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> The organization was launched by former U.S. hedge fund managers seeking to ensure that their own contributions to poverty alleviation would be as effective as possible; [www.givewell.com](http://www.givewell.com). ASAP recently sponsored a GiveWell event at Yale University designed to showcase the work of the organization and to recruit interns for it.

<sup>28</sup> See Abhijit Vinyak Banerjee, “Making Aid Work,” in Joshua Cohen, ed., *Making Aid Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 3–26; see also Abhijit Vinyak Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethink of the Way to Fight Global Poverty* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2011).

resources from illegitimate rulers can be challenged by appeal to existing legal instruments.<sup>29</sup>

Another is developing a complement to the way pharmaceutical innovations are currently incentivized and rewarded through patent-protected markups that predictably render new medicines unaffordable to the world's poor.<sup>30</sup> These are just a few examples of the diverse direct-impact efforts to which poverty-focused academics can contribute their expertise in order to realize the benefits of scale, thereby magnifying the positive effects and amplifying their collective voice on key aspects of poverty.

The final category, the actual inclusion of the global poor in dialogue about why and how best to improve their circumstances, is the least developed overall in academic work, but it also is potentially very significant. Such inclusion goes beyond the empirical study of the contexts in which poverty persists. To be sure, much rigorous, fine-grained fieldwork has been conducted in recent years, by sociologists, anthropologists, economists, and others, on how the poorest struggle to get by.<sup>31</sup> Related work has begun to be more sensitive to the global poor in regard to how they understand their own deprivations and the serious challenges they face. An exemplar is the FemPov project, involving three rounds of intensive interview work at eighteen sites in six countries.<sup>32</sup> Another is the World Bank's ambitious Voices of the Poor project, which has involved interviews with some 60,000 poor persons in

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<sup>29</sup> Details on this effort, launched by King's College London philosopher Leif Wenar, are available at [www.cleantrade.org/](http://www.cleantrade.org/).

<sup>30</sup> The development of this effort, the Health Impact Fund, has involved scores of academics and specialists around the world; see [www.healthimpactfund.org](http://www.healthimpactfund.org). See also Amitava Banerjee, Aidan Hollis, Thomas Pogge, "The Health Impact Fund: Incentives for Improving Access to Medicines," *Lancet* 375 (2010), pp. 166–69.

<sup>31</sup> For a stellar recent exploration of how very poor people manage their incomes and try to make ends meet, see Daryl Collins, Jonathan Morduch, Stuart Rutherford, and Orlanda Ruthven, *Portfolios of the Poor: How the World's Poor Live on \$2 Per Day* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> For details, see the project website, "Measuring Poverty and Gender Disparity": [www.genderpovertymeasure.org/](http://www.genderpovertymeasure.org/).

numerous countries and the production of videos, reports, and three published volumes drawn from the interview data.<sup>33</sup>

An important next step is including the voices of the global poor more directly in the debates that so deeply concern them. Some recent accounts, especially in normative political theory, have made moves in this more inclusive direction. Theorists have conducted qualitative interviews with some of those facing deep deprivation. From this work, they have been able to present or engage arguments offered not only by activists in behalf of the poor<sup>34</sup> but by the poor themselves, including unauthorized immigrants, women, and minority groups suffering from multiple deprivations within states.<sup>35</sup> Such accounts complement but also move beyond more straightforward—and often enormously powerful—oral histories or narrative nonfiction accounts by incorporating the contextualized views of the poor in systematic scholarly arguments about global poverty.<sup>36</sup>

There are many possibilities for promoting inclusion and enabling the poor to join the global discourse more directly. Computer video-linking technology, for example, is making it

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<sup>33</sup> See, e.g., Deepa Narayan, with Raj Patel, Kai Schafft, Anne Rademacher, and Sarah Koch-Schulte, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Detailed information on the full project is available at Voices of the Poor, at [web.worldbank.org](http://web.worldbank.org).

<sup>34</sup> See Brooke Ackerly, *Universal Human Rights in a World of Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> For an account focused in part on unauthorized immigrants and the poor in immigrant-sending areas of Mexico and some other states, see Cabrera, *The Practice of Global Citizenship*. Cabrera's field research included more than 250 interviews with immigrants, as well as immigrant-rights and anti-immigration activists in the United States, Mexico, and Western Europe. For an account that takes significant steps toward including the voices of poor women, see Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Jonathan Wolff, Avner De-Shalit, and colleagues interviewed 100 persons in Britain and Israel, including social workers and their clients, to develop a normative theory of disadvantage rooted in Nussbaum's capabilities approach (Wolff and De-Shalit, *Disadvantage*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> For example, the vulnerabilities and deprivations suffered by many dalits are chronicled in their own voices in the two-volume set produced by Indian civil society groups, with funding from the Netherlands; see Aloysius Irudayam S.J., Jayshree P. Mangubhai, and Joel G. Lee, *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence Against Dalit Women in India* (Delhi: National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 2006). Some aspects of the Voices of the Poor project also would fit in the oral history tradition.

possible to bring activists, documentary filmmakers, elected officials, and others from around the world into the live classroom. While it is important to avoid offering a “token” individual’s views as representative of the global poor, technology could certainly be further deployed to bring grassroots groups from the poorest regions, as well as ordinary individuals, into classroom dialogue, certain types of academic meetings, and a range of other settings.

The overall aim is to enable the global poor to share their own “insider’s wisdom” about their lives—a phrase taken from treatments of democratic governance, where it is seen as a core reason for inclusive decision making.<sup>37</sup> Even the most benevolent government officials will not have full information about how their decisions and policies may affect individuals, so it is important to enable all knowledgeable parties to give input. Similarly, the discourse and efforts related to global poverty can be made more robust through input from those actually facing severe poverty, as well as those relatively better off who share the same context and are willing to advocate for the interests of the very poor. An important example of the latter is the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, based in Delhi. Its members are largely *dalit* (untouchable caste) themselves who work on behalf of the scores of millions of dalits in India who continue to face some of the most adverse social and material conditions in the world.<sup>38</sup>

## **Possible Objections**

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Shapiro, *The State of Democratic Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 39–43.

<sup>38</sup> For details on the evolution of the campaign, including its international links, see Clifford Bob, “‘Dalit Rights Are Human Rights’: Caste Discrimination, International Activism, and the Construction of a New Human Rights Issue,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2007), 167–93.

To be clear, we do not call for some legion of grand “Planners” to descend from their ivory towers and eradicate global poverty at a single pass.<sup>39</sup> Rather, we hope that many more academics will share their expertise and practical insights about poverty and public engagement with one another and thereby make academia’s contributions to poverty alleviation more effective. A group such as ASAP can help ensure that the best ideas find their way into the public discourse. It can do so in part by promoting greater dialogue and interaction across fields. For example, as Keith Horton has argued, there is much to gain from encouraging a more robust dialogue between normative theorists focused on a fairer distribution of the global social product and empirical scholars of aid and development.<sup>40</sup> Such cross-disciplinary dialogue can help ensure that scholars are aware of the best established findings and arguments from the various subfields, and can thus help them avoid retreading old ground or appearing as the naive do-gooders noted above.<sup>41</sup> NGO representatives also can offer valuable insights about past efforts, successes, and failures, and especially about emerging trends in development and aid delivery.<sup>42</sup> More systematic dialogue can highlight complementarities between academic and NGO efforts and provide a means of airing and resolving genuine differences.

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<sup>39</sup> The term is William Easterly’s. He draws a broad contrast in development efforts between “Planners,” who are said to want to apply grand, centrally controlled designs to global social problems, and “Searchers,” who are said to work more incrementally toward specific solutions for specific problems. William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. pt. I.

<sup>40</sup> Keith Horton, “An Appeal to Aid Specialists,” *Development Policy Review* 28, no. 1 (2010), pp. 27–42. And see Horton, [this issue](#). **[Zornitsa, include title of his contribution here?]**

<sup>41</sup> See Roger Riddell, [this issue](#). **[Zornitsa, include title of his contribution here?]**

<sup>42</sup> See Martin Kirk, [this issue](#). **[Zornitsa, include title of his contribution here?]**

These kinds of differences are at the core of Gerald Gaus's argument that philosophers should not attempt to "apply" ethics in public discourse.<sup>43</sup> Such applications are said to discourage an impartial balancing of diverse reasons in favor of a polemical rhetoric aimed at winning adherents. Rather than taking sides, Gaus argues, we would do better to follow the arguments and evidence where they lead and to acknowledge that there often is a "reasonable pluralism" of competing viewpoints on hard cases.

Yet, the same sort of objection might be applied to the presentation of empirical evidence. It might be argued that, once the economist or development specialist steps into the public arena, the nuances of issues around data collection and honest uncertainty about conclusions are too easily lost in the drive to achieve a certain policy outcome. We draw the opposite conclusion about engagement in both cases. Reinforcing the point sketched above, we argue that it is precisely because academics often are well positioned to examine evidence and arguments with rigor, while working to draw the best available judgments therefrom, that they *should* be centrally involved in debates around global poverty. Disagreement about important issues will remain, to be sure. It would be naïve indeed to expect complete agreement from all poverty scholars on, for example, the MDG replacement effort—its poverty indicators, measurement criteria, means of implementation, and so on. It would be equally problematic, however, to presume that such disagreement must necessarily lead to an impasse, and that it is therefore impossible to identify points of underlying agreement through dialogue among specialists.

It is entirely plausible to think that agreement can be reached on some important aspects of the replacement effort—for example, on holding affluent states

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<sup>43</sup> Gaus, "Should Philosophers 'Apply Ethics'?"

to more specific commitments.<sup>44</sup> Seeing how much is at stake in the outcome, poverty-focused academics have compelling reason to want to be involved in the debates. Working within a group such as ASAP can help us move beyond a continual rehash of narrow disagreements, toward identifying broadly shared assumptions and conclusions and developing those in meaningful ways for public and policy-maker audiences.

Another objection might be raised around demandingness. It is unfair, some may argue, to expect academics, who already have many demands on their time and energy, to give more of themselves to global poverty than other advantaged persons. One possible response to this objection points out that academics are not to be asked to input more than others, but to achieve more through their inputs. Thus, if materially secure persons ought to give up to, say, 10 percent of their time, then academics need give no more; but with their greater expertise they ought to achieve more than typical nonacademics (though both are to achieve as much as possible with the time and other resources they set aside for poverty eradication).

This response may well be too conservative. Someone who, for each hour she puts in, can add \$100 to the incomes of extremely poor people ought presumably to put in more hours than a similarly advantaged nonexpert who, for each hour put in, can add only \$10. Would such a view place unfairly excessive burdens on academics? An organization such as ASAP can help avoid this. Playing a coordinating role, ASAP can greatly increase the number of contributing academics and organize their collaboration so that burdens are minimized through heightened efficiency and fair

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<sup>44</sup> See also Keith Horton, “Academics Stand Against Poverty: The Story So Far” (2011); [academicsstand.org/article/academics-stand-against-poverty-the-story-so-far/](http://academicsstand.org/article/academics-stand-against-poverty-the-story-so-far/).

distribution.<sup>45</sup> Through information sharing and dialogue, ASAP members can also assist one another in connecting to existing outreach and impact efforts where they can put their expertise and energy to the most efficient uses.

Finally, it might be argued that, if academics ought to take on a public role in the fight against poverty, they should prioritize domestic poverty. We have duties of reciprocity to compatriots, who have themselves contributed the most to affording us the time to pursue our own research agendas and to disseminate our ideas. We should therefore work primarily to alleviate relative domestic poverty rather than absolute global poverty.

Yet, this objection holds only if duties of reciprocity trump other duties. This could be denied. It could be argued that supranational institutions we cooperate in upholding are grievously unjust on account of the massive and avoidable poverty they engender, and that we must end this injustice or protect its victims pursuant to a negative duty (not to harm), which is more stringent than our duties toward compatriots.<sup>46</sup> It could also be argued that our general positive duties toward extremely poor people abroad are more stringent because their needs are greater and cheaper to meet.

A more fundamental issue can be raised regarding the justice of the background conditions that are said to give rise to duties of reciprocity. Until it has been demonstrated that the exclusions and territorial restrictions associated with the current global system are morally defensible, a system of reciprocity built atop them is open to question. To illustrate the point, imagine a slave owner who has turned over a slave to another owner on condition that he will later receive a similarly valuable slave in return. This reciprocal contract cannot help justify the system of slavery on which it rests. Analogously, a felt need to repay favors done for compatriots in a wealthy society, or to compensate them for freedom-limiting laws

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<sup>45</sup> See Henry Shue, "Mediating Duties," *Ethics* 98, no. 4 (1988), pp. 687–704.

<sup>46</sup> Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, esp. chaps. 3–5.



imposed,<sup>47</sup> cannot be held up as proof that domestic duties of reciprocity trump those to the global poor, unless it can be established that the system on which the ostensible domestic duties rest is just. If the society's affluence is sustained by a global system of rules that avoidably keeps billions in poverty, then the priority its members give to one another may be a violation of human rights rather than the fulfillment of a morally sound reciprocal contract.<sup>48</sup>

## Conclusion

Let us close by inviting academics and graduate students interested in poverty alleviation to join Academics Stand Against Poverty. We also welcome affiliate members from poverty-focused NGOs and all levels of public service. Some more specific background on ASAP will be useful here. The initiative was launched by academics in Australia and the United States who were seeking better ways to leverage scholarly expertise on global poverty and promote collaboration across disciplines.<sup>49</sup> Initial organizing efforts led to formal launch meetings in 2010–2011 involving scores of participants at, respectively, Yale University, University of Birmingham, University of Oslo, University of Notre Dame London Centre, and University of Delhi. An ASAP Anniversary Meeting was staged at Yale in April 2012. Participants at each meeting helped identify priorities for the organization and gave feedback on one another's project proposals.

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<sup>47</sup> See Richard Miller, "Cosmopolitan Respect and Patriotic Concern," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 27, no. 3 (1998), pp. 202–24.

<sup>48</sup> For recent accounts offering general critiques of strong compatriot priority in distributions, see Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*; Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Darrel Moellendorf, *Global Inequality Matters* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Gillian Brock, *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> See Horton, "Academics Stand Against Poverty: The Story So Far."

Other early efforts have centered on developing the organization's website ([www.academicstand.org](http://www.academicstand.org)), which is meant to provide information about academic outreach and impact projects globally, and to enable academics to connect with like-minded others and to collaborate in various ways. ASAP provides many opportunities for academics to share information and to engage directly in dialogue through its World Poverty Forum feature. This forum includes short articles highlighting new research focused on key global policy events, such as the post-MDG efforts, and offering insight on some effective means of pursuing outreach to broader audiences as well as to policy-makers. Individual users are able to offer feedback online, to post brief recommended reads, and to pose questions for open dialogue.

ASAP also aims to nurture and provide a collaborative platform for some impact projects. One such important early project is the already mentioned Global Poverty Consensus Report, initially meant to gather academic contributions to the post-MDG dialogue, and which will also identify broader points of agreement that could meaningfully inform aspects of global policy. Additional impact projects are in development, and ASAP is dedicated to helping potential project collaborators find one another and to facilitating information sharing regarding sources of project funding and support.

We began this essay somewhat pessimistically, highlighting ways in which efforts to eradicate absolute poverty globally have had insufficient impact. There are various reasons for this insufficiency. One is an excess of “good ideas,” such as one finds at the World Social Forum, where thousands of people present thousands of good ideas—almost all of which are bound to drown one another out. ASAP can help overcome this problem by selecting and amplifying the best ideas and by focusing the efforts of many on their realization. It is hard to know in advance how much academics collaborating across national and disciplinary borders can contribute to the fight against poverty. But our special societal roles and capacities give reasons to believe that we can make distinctive and substantial contributions. The need for

more effective action is certainly urgent. Let us make a more concerted effort as researchers and teachers to help build alliances of people, associations, and organizations fighting to end severe poverty worldwide.